

A Quarterly of New Literature

# ACCENT

WILLIAM SANSON:  
How Claey's Died

DANIEL CURLEY:  
Saccovanzetti

JOHN WALLER:  
The Poetry of Keith Douglas

ROBERT M. ADAMS:  
A Hawk and a Handsaw for Ezra Pound

WILLARD MAAS  
VERNON WATKINS

MASON JORDAN MASON  
VERNON A. YOUNG

SUMMER, 1948

30 CENTS

NEW BOOKS BY

# EZRA POUND

**THE CANTOS.** The complete poem to date, Cantos 1 to 84, all in one volume. \$5.00

**THE PISAN CANTOS.** Cantos 74 to 84, the new ones written during the war. . . \$2.75

## RECENT COMMENT ON POUND

**T. S. ELIOT:** "To those who have read the previous Cantos, THE PISAN CANTOS will present little difficulty. In my opinion, they are superior to some of those which precede them; and in the place for which they are intended in the whole work, they will hold their own with any. I find in them the same technical mastery, and a new poignancy of personal speech. Such an achievement is all the more worthy of admiration, because of their having been written under conditions which, for most men, would have stifled inspiration; and which, if they had not stifled inspiration, would certainly have prevented the author from bringing his work to completion."

**ALLEN TATE:** "Whether Pound was guilty of treason I do not know: he could not be brought to trial. And to be indicted is not to be convicted. Let us assume, for the moment, that he **was** guilty. It would be a guilt of moral and religious conviction publicly expressed, not a secret betrayal of his country. Call it, if you will, a political mistake, though I do not know what, for a poet, a **political** mistake is, unless it is a failure to distinguish between the imaginative and the historical orders. . . . If this is not borne clearly in mind, great injustice will continue to be done to Pound's poetry. One of the Popes had Dante's works burnt because he had supported the cause of the Emperor. Who cares about Dante's politics today? I will continue to read Pound's verse with as much pleasure and profit as if he had no 'political' views at all."

**JOHN CROWE RANSOM:** "THE CANTOS is a modern classic that everybody has to know. No poet ever had greater purity of phrase. I don't know whether the cantos are poems, but they are certainly poetry."

Other books by Ezra Pound: **Personae**. The collected verse apart from the CANTOS, \$3.50. **Polite Essays**. Flashingly impolite essays on literary appreciation, \$2.50.

new directions, 500 fifth avenue, new york 18



# ACCENT

A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE

Volume 8, Number 4

Summer, 1948

---

## WILLIAM SANSON:

### How Claeys Died

In Germany, two months after the capitulation, tall green grass and corn had grown up round every remnant of battle, so that the war seemed to have happened many years ago. A tank, nosing up from the corn like a pale grey toad, would already be rusted, ancient: the underside of an overturned carrier exposed intricacies red-brown and clogged like an agricultural machine abandoned for years. Such objects were no longer the contemporary traffic, they were exceptional carcasses; one expected their armor to melt like the armor of crushed beetles, to enter the earth and help fertilize further the green growth in which they were already drowned.

Claeys and his party — two officers and a driver — drove past many of these histories, through miles of such fertile green growth stretching flatly to either side of the straight and endless grey avenues. Presently they entered the outskirts of a town. This was a cathedral town, not large, not known much — until by virtue of a battle its name now resounded in black letters the size of the capital letters on the maps of whole countries. This name would now ring huge for generations, it would take its part in the hymn of a national glory; such a name had already become sacred, stony, a symbol of valor. Claeys looked about him with interest — he had never seen the town before, only heard of the battle and suffered with the soldiers who had taken it and held it for four hopeful days with the hope dying each hour until nearly

all were dead, hope and soldiers. Now as they entered the main street, where already the white tram-trains were hooting, where the pale walls were chipped and bullet-chopped, where nevertheless there had never been the broad damage of heavy bombs and where therefore the pavements and shop-fronts were already washed and civil — as they entered these streets decked with summer dresses and flecked with leaf patterns, Claeys looked in vain for the town of big letters, and smelled only perfume; a wall of perfume; they seemed to have entered a scent-burg, a sissy-burg, a town of female essences, Grasse — but it was only that this town happened to be planted with lime-trees, lime-trees everywhere, and these limes were all in flower, whose essence drifted down to the streets and filled them. The blood was gone, the effort of blood had evaporated. Only scent, flowers, sunlight, trams, white dresses.

"A nice memorial," Claeys thought. "Keep it in the geography book." Then the car stopped outside a barracks. The officers got out. Claeys said he would wait in the car. He was not in uniform, he was on a civil mission, attached temporarily to the army. It does not matter what mission. It was never fulfilled. All that need be said is that Claeys was a teacher, engaged then on relief measures, a volunteer for this work of rehabilitation of the enemy, perhaps a sort of half-brother-of-mercy as during the occupation he had been a sort of half-killer. Now he wanted to construct quickly the world of which he had dreamed during the shadow years; now he was often as impatient of inaction as he had learned to be patient before. Patience bends before promise: perhaps this curiosity for spheres of action quickened his interest as now a lorry-load of soldiers drew up and jumped down at the barrack-gate. One of the soldiers said: "They're using mortars." Another was saying: "And do you blame 'em?"

There had been trouble, they told Claeys, up at the camp for expatriates — the camp where forced laborers imported from all over Europe waited for shipment home. A group of these had heard that a released German prisoner-of-war was returning to work his farm in the vicinity of the camp. They had decided to raid the farm at nightfall, grab as much food as possible, teach the German a trick or two. But the German had somehow got hold of a grenade — from the fields, or perhaps hidden in the farmhouse. At any rate, he had thrown it and killed two of the expatriates. The others had retreated, the story had spat round, before long the expatriates were coming back on the farm in full strength. They had rifles and even mortars. The



news got back to the occupational military and a piquet had been sent over. The mortars were opening fire as it arrived: but they were stopped, the expatriates respected the British. Yet to maintain this respect they had to keep a piquet out there for the night. Not all the Polskis or Czechskis or whoever they were had gone home. A few had hung about, grumbling. The air was by no means clear.

When the officers returned, Claeys told them that he had altered his plans, he wanted to go up and take a look at this expatriates' camp. He gave no reason, and it is doubtful whether he had then a special reason; he felt only that he ought to see these expatriates and talk to them. He had no idea of what to say, but something of the circumstances might suggest a line later.

So they drove out into the country again, into the green. Rich lucent corn stretched endlessly to either side of the straight and endless road. Regularly, in perfect order, precisely intervalled beeches flashed by: a rich, easy, discreet roof of leaves shaded their passage as the foliage met high above. Occasionally a notice at the roadside reminded them of mines uncleared beyond the verges, occasionally a tree bore an orderly white notice addressed to civil traffic. And occasionally a unit of civil traffic passed — a family wheeling a handcart, a cyclist and his passenger, and once a slow-trudging German soldier making his grey way back along the long road to his farm. But there was nothing about this figure in grey-green to suggest more than a farmer dressed as a soldier; he walked slowly, he seemed to be thinking slowly, secure in his destination and free of time as any countryman walking slowly home on an empty road.

All was order. Birds, of course, sang. A green land, unbelievably quiet and rich, sunned its moisture. Each square yard lay unconcerned with the next, just as each measure of the road lay back as they passed, unconcerned with their passing, contented, remaining where it had always been under its own beech, a piece of land. And when at last the beech-rows stopped, the whole of that flat country seemed to spread itself suddenly open. The sky appeared, blue and sailing small white clouds to give it air. Those who deny the flatlands forget the sky — over flat country the sky approaches closer than anywhere else, it takes shape, it becomes the blue-domed lid on a flat plate of earth. Here is a greater intimacy between the elements; and for once, for a little, the world appears finite.

The carload of four travelled like a speck over this flat space. And Claeys was thinking: "Such a summer, such still air — something

like a mother presiding heavily and quietly, while down in her young the little vigors boil and breed . . . air almost solid, a sort of unseen fruit fibre . . . a husk guarding the orderly chaos of the breeding ground . . ."

Such a strict order seemed indeed to preside within the intricate anarchy — success and failure, vigorous saplings from the seeds of good fortune, a pennyworth of gas from the seeds that fall on stony ground: yet a sum total of what might appear to be complete achievement, and what on the human level appears to be peace. And on that level, the only real level, there appeared — over by the popular plumes? Or by the windmill? Or at some flat-point among the converged hedges? — there appeared one scar, a scar of purely human disorder: over somewhere lay this camp of ten thousand displaced souls, newly freed but imprisoned still by their strange environment and by their great expectations born and then as instantly barred. On the face of it, these seemed to represent disorder, or at most a residue of disorder. But was this really so? Would such disorder not have appeared elsewhere, in similar quantity and under conditions of apparent order? Were they, perhaps, not anything more than stony-grounders — the disfavored residue of an anarchic nature never governed directly, only impalpably guided by more general and less concerned governments? Was it right to rationalize, to impose order upon such seed, was it right — or at least, was it sensible? It was right, obviously — for a brain made to reason is itself a part of nature and it would be wrong to divert it from its necessitous reasoning. But right though reason may be, there was no more reason to put one's faith in the impeccable work of the reasoning brain than to imagine that any other impressive yet deluded machine — like, for instance, the parachute seed — should by its apparent ingenuity succeed. Look at the parachute seed — this amazing seed actually flies off the insensate plant-mother! It sails on to the wind! The seed itself hangs beneath such an intricate parasol, it is carried from the roots of its mother to land on fertile ground far away and set up there an emissary generation! And more — when it lands, this engine is so constructed that draughts inch-close to the soil drag, drag, drag at the little parachute, so that the seed beneath actually erodes the earth, digs for itself a little trench of shelter, buries itself! Amazing! And what if the clever little seed is borne on the wrong wind to a basin of basalt?

Claeys was thinking: "The rule of natural anarchy — a few succeed, many waste and die. No material waste: only a huge waste of



effort. The only sure survival is the survival of the greater framework that includes the seed and all other things on the earth — the furious landcrab, the bright young eskimo, the Antiguan cornbroker — every thing and body . . . and these thrive and decay and compensate . . . just as we, on the threshold of some golden age of reason, just as we are the ones to harness some little nuclear genius, pack it into neat canisters, store it ready to blow up all those sunny new clinics when the time comes, the time for compensation . . .”

Just then the car drove into a small town on the bank of a broad river. Instantly, in a matter of yards, the green withered and the party found themselves abruptly in what seemed to be some sort of a quarry, dry, dug-about, dust-pale, slagged up on either side with excavated stones.

It was indeed an excavation; it was of course the street of a town. This town was dead. It had been bombed by a thousand aircraft, shelled by an entire corps of artillery, and then fought through by land soldiers. No houses were left, no streets. The whole had been churned up, smashed and jig-sawed down again, and some of the jig-saw pieces left up-ended — those gaunt walls remaining — and the rest of the pieces desiccated into mounds and hollows and flats. No grass grew. The air hung sharp with vaporized dust. A few new alleys had been bulldozed through; these seemed pointless, for now there was no traffic, the armies had passed through, the town was deserted. Somewhere in the centre Claeys stopped the car. He held up his hand for silence. The four men listened. Throughout that wasted city there was no sound. No distant muttering, no murmur. No lost hammering, no drowned cry. No word, no footstep. No wheels. No wind shifting a branch — for there were no trees. No flapping of torn cloth, this avalanche had covered all the cloth. No birds — but one, a small bird that flew straight over, without singing; above such a desert it moved like a small vulture, a shadow, a bird without destination. Brick, concrete, gravel-dust — with only two shaped objects as far all round as they could see: one, an intestinal engine of fat iron pipes, black and big as an up-ended lorry, something thrown out of a factory; and leaning on its side a pale copper-green byzantine cupola like a gigantic sweet-kiosk blown over by the wind, the tower fallen from what had been the town church. This — in a town that had been the size of Reading.

Almost reverently, as on sacred ground, they started the car and drove off again. Through the pinkish-white mounds the sound of

the motor seemed now to intrude garishly. Claeys wanted only to be out of the place. Again, this destruction seemed to have occurred years before; but now because of the very absence of green, of any life at all, of any reason to believe that people had ever lived there. Not even a torn curtain. They wormed through and soon, as abruptly as before, the country began and as from a seasonless pause the summer embraced them once more.

Claeys stood up off his seat to look over the passing hedges. The camp was somewhere near now. The driver said, two kilometres. Surely, Claeys thought, surely with that dead town so near the men in this camp could realize the extent of the upheaval, the need for a pause before their journey could be organized? Surely they must see the disruption, this town, the one-way bridges over every stream far around, the roads pitted and impassable? Yet . . . what real meaning had these evidences? Really, they were too negative to be understood, too much again of something long finished. It was not as if something positive, like an army passing, held up one's own purpose; not even a stream of aircraft, showing that at least somewhere there was an effort and direction. No, over these fields there was nothing, not even the sense of a pause, when something might be re-started; instead a vacuity stretched abroad, a vacuum of human endeavor, with the appalling contrast of this vegetable growth continuing evenly and unconcerned. That was really the comprehensible evidence, this sense of the land and of the essence of life continuing, so that one must wish to be up and walking away, to be off to take part not in a regrowth but in a simple continuation of what had always been. For every immediate moment there was food to be sought, the pleasures of taste to be enjoyed: what was more simple than to walk out and put one's hands on a cap-full of eggs, a pig, a few fat hens? And if a grey uniform intervened, then it was above all a grey uniform, something instinctively obstructive, in no real sense connected with the dead town. The only real sympathy that ever came sometimes to soften the greyness of this grey was a discovery, felt occasionally with senses of wonder and unease, that this uniform went walking and working through its own mined cornfields and sometimes blew itself up — that therefore there must be a man inside it, a farmer more than a soldier. But the grey was mostly an obstruction to the ordinary daily desire for food, for fun, for something to be tasted. The day for these men was definitely a day. It was no twenty-four hours building up to a day in the future when something would happen. No future day had been



promised. There was, therefore, no succession of days, no days for ticking off, for passing through and storing in preparation. There were, in fact, the days themselves, each one a matter for living, each a separate dawning and tasting and setting.

Suddenly Claeys heard singing, a chorus of men's voices. A second later the driver down behind the windshield heard it. He nodded, as though they had arrived. The singing grew louder, intimate — as though it came from round a corner that twisted the road immediately ahead. But it came from a lane just before, it flourished suddenly into a full-throated Slavic anthem — and there was the lane crowded with men, some sitting, others marching four abreast out into the road. The car whirled down to a dead halt. The singing wavered and stopped. Claeys saw that the driver had only his left hand on the wheel — his other hand was down gripping the black butt of a revolver at his knee. (He had never done this driving through German crowds earlier.)

"It's not the camp," the driver said. "These are some of them, though. The camp's a kilometre up the road." He kept his eyes scanning slowly up and down the line of men crowding in the lane's entry, he never looked up at Claeys. Then the men came a few paces forward, though they looked scarcely interested. Probably they were pushed forward by the crowd behind, many of whom could not have seen the car, many of whom were still singing.

Claeys stood upright and said: "I'd like to talk to these . . . you drive on, get round the corner and wait. I don't want that military feeling."

The men looked on with mild interest, as though they might have had many better things to do. They looked scarcely "displaced"; they had a self-contained air, an independence. There was no censure in their stare; equally no greeting; nor any love. Their clothes were simple, shirts and greyish trousers and boots: though these were weather-stained, they were not ragged.

Claeys jumped down. An interest seemed to quicken in some of the watching men as they saw how Claeys was dressed — beret, plus-fours, leather jacket. It was because of these clothes that the military in the car gave Claeys no salute as they drove off; also because they disapproved of this kind of nonsense, and this may have been why they neither smiled nor waved, but rather nodded impersonally and whirled off round the corner. They might, for instance, have been dropping Claeys after giving him some sort of a lift.

So that Claeys was left quite alone on the road, standing and smil-

ing at the crowd of expatriates grouped at the entrance to the lane. The car had disappeared. It had driven off the road and round the corner. There, as often happens when a vehicle disappears from view, its noise had seemed to vanish too. Presumably it had stopped. But equally it might have been presumed far away on its journey to the next town.

The men took a pace or two forward, now beginning to form a crescent-shape round Claeys, while Claeys began to speak in English: "Good afternoon, mates. Excuse me, I'm Pieter Claeys — native of Belge." None of the men smiled. They only stared hard at him. They were too absorbed now even to mutter a word between themselves. They were searching for an explanation, a sign that would clarify this stranger. They were unsure and certainly, it seemed, unimpressed. "Good afternoon, comrades," Claeys shouted. "Gentlemen, hello!"

Without waiting, for the silence was beginning to weigh, he turned into French. "Suis Claeys de Belge. Je veux vous aider. Vous permettez — on peut causer un peu?"

He repeated: "Peut-être?" And in the pause while no one answered he looked up and above the heads of these men, feeling that his smile might be losing its first flavor, that somehow an embarrassment might be dissolved if he looked away.

The country again stretched wide and green. Claeys was startled then to see sudden huge shapes of paint-box color erecting themselves in the distance. But then immediately he saw what they were — the wings and fuselages of broken gliders. They rose like the fins of huge fish, tilted at queer angles, grounded and breathlessly still. Difficult at first to understand, for their shapes were strange and sudden, and of an artifice dangerously like something natural: brightly colored, they might have been shapes torn from an abstract canvas and stuck wilfully on this green background: or the bright broken toys left by some giant child.

Claeys tried again: "Gijmijneheeren zijn blijfbaar in moeilijkheden. Ik zou die gaarne vernemen . . ."

The Dutch words came ruggedly out with a revival of his first vigor, for Claeys was more used to Dutch and its familiarity brought some ease again to his smile. It brought also a first muttering from the men.

They began to mutter to each other in a Slav-sounding dialect — Polish, Ukrainian, Czech, Russian? — and as this muttering grew it seemed to become an argument. Claeys wanted instantly to make himself clearer, he seemed to have made some headway at last and so now



again he repeated the Dutch. This time he nodded, raised his arm in a gesture, even took a pace forward in his enthusiasm. But now one of the men behind began to shout angrily, and would have pushed himself forward shaking his fist — had the others not held him.

It was not clear to Claeys — he felt that the Dutch had been understood, and yet what he had said was friendly . . . he began to repeat the words again. Then, half-way through, he thought of a clearer way. He broke into German. There was every chance that someone might understand German; they might have been working here for three years or more; or anyway it was the obvious second language. “. . . so bin ich hier hergekommen um Ihnen zu helfen. Bitte Kameraden, hören Sie mal . . .”

The muttering rose, they were plainly talking — and now not to each other but to him. The crescent had converged into a half-circle, these many men with livening faces were half round him. Claeys stood still. Overhead the summer sky made its huge dome, under which this small group seemed to make the pin-point centre. The green quiet stretched endlessly away to either side, the painted gliders stuck up brightly. No traffic.

“. . . bitte einen moment . . . ich bin Freund, Freund, FREUND . . .” And as he repeated this word “friend” he realized what his tongue had been quicker to understand — that none of his listeners knew the meaning of these German words. They knew only that he was speaking German, they knew the intonation well.

He stopped. For a moment, as the men nudged each other nearer, as the Slav words grew into accusation and imprecation, Claeys’s mind fogged up, appalled by this muddle, helplessly overwhelmed by such absurdity, such disorder and misunderstanding.

Then, making an effort to clear himself, he shook his head and looked closely from one man to the other. But the composure had gone: they were all mouth, eyes, anger and desire — they were no longer independent. And this was accumulating, breeding itself beyond the men as men. They had become a crowd.

Knowing that words were of no further use, Claeys did the natural thing — wearily, slowly he raised his arm in a last despairing bid for silence.

An unfortunate gesture. The shouting compounded into one confused roar. One of the men on the edge of the crowd jumped out and swung something in the air — a scythe. It cut Claeys down, and then all the pack of them were on him, kicking, striking, grunting and shouting less.

Claeys must have screamed as the scythe hit him — two shots thundered like two full stops into that muddle, there was an abrupt silence and two men fell forward; and then another shot and the men scattered crying into the lane.

Those three soldiers came running up to Claeys's body. They shot again into the men crowding the lane; but then the men, bottled up in the narrow lane, suddenly turned and raised their arms above their heads. The soldiers held their fire, their particular discipline actuated more strongly than their emotions. Two of them kept their guns alert, gestured the men forward. They came, hands raised, shambling awkwardly. The other officer bent down to Claeys.

He was almost finished, messed with blood and blue-white where the flesh showed. He was breathing, trying to speak; and the officer knelt down on both his knees and raised Claeys's head up. But Claeys never opened his eyes — they were bruised shut, anyway. And no words came from his lips, though the officer lowered his head and listened very carefully.

Through the pain, through his battered head, one thought muddled out enormously. "Mistake . . . mistake . . ." And this split into two other confused, unanswered questions — weakening, dulling questions. Broadly, if they could have been straightened out, these questions would have been: "Order or Disorder? Those fellows were the victims of an attempt to rule men into an impeccable order, my killing was the result of the worst, that is, the most stupid disorder . . ."

But he couldn't get the words out, or any like them. Only — weakly, slowly he raised his right hand. He groped for the officer's hand, and the officer knew what he wanted and met the hand with his own in a handshake. Claeys just managed to point at the place where the men had been, where they still were. Then his head sank deep on to his neck. Again the officer knew what he wanted. He rose, his hand still outstretched from Claeys's grasp, like a hand held out by a splint. Then he started over towards the men.

Instinctively, for this hand of his was wet with blood, he wiped it on his tunic as he walked forward. Without knowing this, he raised his hand again into its gesture of greeting. There was a distasteful expression on his face, for he hardly liked such a duty.

So that when he shook hands with the first of the men, proffering to them, in fact, Claeys' handshake, none of these expatriates knew whether the officer was giving them Claeys' hand or whether he had wiped Claeys' gesture away in distaste and was now offering them his congratulation for killing such a common enemy as Claeys.



# ROBERT M. ADAMS:

## A Hawk and a Handsaw for Ezra Pound

What shall we think of Ezra Pound? For twenty years he has provoked opinion and defied agreement. In 1928 T. S. Eliot pronounced the *Cantos* the only poem of some length by a contemporary that he could read with admiration. In 1930 Louis Zukovsky inspected the first twenty-seven *Cantos* and found them "closely related in method and spirit to the kind of ideation found in Dante's *Divine Comedy*." In 1935 Horace Gregory said Ezra Pound had been mentally moribund since 1918. In 1938 Delmore Schwartz paid tribute to Pound as one of the great inventors of the age. In 1940 J. V. Healy said, approximately, that in a confusing and incoherent way Pound was a great poet. In 1942 Eunice Tietjens solemnly read him out of the pages of *Poetry* for giving aid and comfort to Mussolini. In 1943 the government indicted him for treason; in 1945 the indictment was dismissed, and Ezra Pound was committed to Saint Elizabeth's Federal Hospital, as a man of unsound mind. Now he reappears, the subject of a respectful volume by a member of a respected academy, the subject of a special issue of a reputable magazine, the protagonist of a poetic drama by a bright young poet, his verses respectfully reprinted by the most forward of avant-garde publications. This is where we came in; all right; but what's been going on in the meantime?

One attitude is clearly impossible. *Poetry* might raze the name of Ezra Pound from its pages, but his presence could not and cannot be forbidden. Not a serious poet wrote a line of English verse after 1930 without owing something to Ezra Pound; not a critic plied his ghoulish trade without having to mark Ezra Pound's astringent presence. More than any other one man, Pound cleared the poetic atmosphere for the twentieth century; and the hard style he did so much to uncover is now our common possession. So where do we stand? Are we dealing with a mind which is vicious, diseased, or great? Is the proper comparison with Dante, Judas, or Don Quixote? All thinking people are involved in the decisions and divisions to which this question gives rise.

## I

The epic project on which Ezra Pound has been working for thirty-five years must provide the chief material for any judgment of him. A hundred *Cantos* were originally proposed, through which would run a variety of ideas, phrases, and characters, orchestrated after the manner of a Bach fugue. There would be, said Ezra Pound, "no plot, no chronicle of events, no logic of discourse, but two themes, the descent into Hades from Homer, a metamorphosis from Ovid, and mixed with these medieval or modern historical characters." The themes were to be developed through a series of historical parallels; or, rather, the medieval and modern historical characters were to be treated as interchangeable, contemporaneous figures. The metamorphosis theme would evidently emerge from the alternation of these characters; the descent into Hades provided for the poem its larger outline.

The style of writing which Pound chose contributed to the slither of characters across themes. Because it developed its points by the violent contrast of separate images, rather than the logic of discourse, the style of the *Cantos* has been called "ideogramic." With just as much propriety, it might be called "Imagist" or "Symbolist"; for its outstanding feature was the presentation of ideas through verbal images. Pound professed a desire to use words denotatively rather than connotatively; but in practice he orchestrated exotic place-names, pathetic fallacies, and other romantic machinery freely through his poetry. In practice also, he often supplemented this mosaic of impressionistically connected (or deliberately unconnected) images with a similar mosaic of quotations. The overall effect was as of a plum pudding dusted with broken glass.

The philosophy underlying his style Pound once described as "voluntaristic." This meant that to convey direct, intense, confusing experience was, in the poet's view, poetry's ultimate aim and only source of genuine conviction. The minute an idea was generalized or an experience abstracted, it became a tyrant itself and a weapon in the hands of dishonest men. By the honesty of his word-usage the poet thus undertook to redeem the language and the mind of Western civilization. In a poem built out of hard, fragmentary word-pictures drawn by Pound himself, and out of samples of genuine speech by others, he would establish a new and valid world-outlook based upon direct and accurate representation. With his usual talent for nomenclature, Pound titled his new insight the "totalitarian outlook," and attributed it to Jefferson, Mussolini, and some others.



The objective which Pound had set himself was not only proper, it was irreproachable. Making a distinction between the genuine and the fraudulent is truly the poet's first business. But the "totalitarian outlook" quickly proved itself an erratic guide. It encouraged in Pound the profound love of honest craftsmanship which has been his great contribution to our literature. It also led him to look with uncritical eyes on Mussolini's economy of work, war, and bombast, to invest Major Douglas' scheme for Social Credit and Martin Van Buren's *Autobiography* with occult social meanings, and to devise halfbaked plans of his own for simplifying the relations between the craftsman and his craft. The "totalitarian outlook" warped his personality into paranoid patterns; it convinced him that his mission in life was to "save the constitution" by broadcasting from Radio Rome, and rendered him at last "mentally unfit to advise with counsel or to participate intelligently and reasonably in his own defence" when charged with treason in Federal Court.

To the casual citizen, Pound's "totalitarian outlook," with its naive concept of integrity as nominalism, its glorification of the vivid experience, its rejection of logic, and its explicit authoritarianism, made sense chiefly as protest. But the protest could not be isolated out of the poetry. Pound's *Cantos* are stage-set in Hell, to be sure; but it is Homer's Hell, not Dante's and no contrast with Earth, Purgatory, or Paradise is seriously attempted or implied. The *Cantos* never take us outside Hell or away from it. The timeless, chaotic world of Pound's Hell is actually the timeless, chaotic world of artistic creation and of life itself. In short, Pound's world-view was not put forward, nor has it been accepted, simply as a protest. Despite a good many hedgings and weasel-wordings, it is today being proposed and defended as a valid philosophy of literary creation.

And, after all, why not? The "totalitarian outlook" of Pound does not negate, in any serious way, the going literary attitudes. In that composite literary ideal where Kafka, Proust, James, Eliot, and Professor Burnham lie strangely merged, are found the same elements of authoritarianism, anti-popularism, mental incoherence, defeatism, and emphasis on "integrity" narrowly defined, as occur in Pound. In technique, in attitude, and in ideology, Pound has often been bolder than his times, but rarely unrepresentative of them. He invoked Major Douglas and Mussolini when his contemporaries were invoking Lambeth Palace, Leon Trotsky, or an eikon of the Artist as Exile. But Pound's Fascist views were, in sober truth, only a "miscalculation."

The problems he faced, his attitude toward them, and the medium in which he presented them, were wholly typical of intellectuals in his and our times. Thus, if the *Cantos* are to be called the work of a diseased mind, we must recognize that the sickness itself is epidemic.

The absurdity of this supposition has often, and unjustifiably, been taken for granted. Mr. Pound, we are told, cannot be an unbalanced or dangerous man; for, look, does he not deal with the same problems, from the same point of view, as highly conservative and respectable figures like Mr. Eliot? To be sure, he often does. But because birds of a feather flock together, it does not follow that they are all peacocks. Granted that he belongs squarely in the center of the current literary kaffee-klatch, does that fact justify Ezra Pound or render suspect the whole company?

## II

The primary mark of paranoia is a delusion which the victim gradually organizes out of a mass of erroneous beliefs or convictions, until it forms an integral part of his ordinary mental processes. Persecutory paranoia, one of the four major types, usually occurs in quiet and scholarly persons, who suffer from an undefined sense of ill treatment. Lacking specific persecutors, the sufferers generally talk of their enemies vaguely as "they," or blame their misfortunes on a corporate body, such as "lawyers," "priests," "freemasons," or "Jews." The disease is a profound, and ordinarily incurable mental disorder. Though often confined to a single mania in the early stages, the disease is predatory, and a personality seriously paranoid is not held legally or morally responsible for any of his acts. This is the disease from which Ezra Pound suffers.

Like most serious writers of our day, Pound has been chiefly concerned with the artist's need to be independent of the values of a commercial civilization. Throughout the first XXX *Cantos* one can see Pound's definition of this problem slowly being organized out of a mass of miscellaneous convictions. His hatreds are for Babbitts and tourists, for national and international capitalists, munitions manufacturers, and their fronts, the journalists and liberal politicians. Behind all these figures lurk others — the un-named, still-shadowy "usurers," who hamper all right-thinking men in their efforts to understand and change the world. With the fourth decad of *Cantos*, dating from the years 1930-1934, this hatred of "usurers" becomes more explicit. It is of course expressed in violent, incoherent images, which



may or may not have a meaning larger than their own contrasted textures. Tales of The Boss (Benito), scandals from Andrew Jackson's Bank War, accounts of a 16th-century Italian mountain of piety, and satirical representations of a Jewish accent, all lie helter-skelter about; and as images without mutual relations or connected meanings, they may be accepted or rejected, arbitrarily. But if we are to construct what Pound's expounder has called "an arch" over the *Cantos*, "an empyrean, a crystal sphere that will majestically span the entirety of the *Cantos*," — what, then, is Pound trying to allege? He is insinuating a vast plot, concerted by persons thousands of miles and hundreds of years apart, for the purpose of emasculating the Western mind and gaining unearned increment. Because they involve generalizations of an order quite alien to intellectual method or the demands of rational evidence, these views are clinically paranoid. To be blunt, they are as crazy as Hitler's diatribes against world Jewry, to which they bear a family resemblance. When convenient, Pound can doubtless dismiss anti-semitism as a red herring, for his mania allows him to bait Jews only as usurers or representatives of usury. But this angle of attack is quite adequate. Thus he hits off Wellington neatly by calling him a "jew's pimp," and strikes a familiar note by quoting Bismarck (an authority) to the effect that the Jews caused the American Civil War. Given this background, we should not be surprised at the choice of adjectives when Pound addresses himself (with the entire approval of his academic commentator) to reforming the *Anglo-Saxon* reader. Kikes, niggers, and other undesirables, we gather, need not apply.

For seventeen or nineteen or ninety years — Canto XLVI is not quite clear on the chronology — Ezra Pound prepared and presented his case against capitalist democracy, usury, and their maleficent effects. It was not the last case or the whole case, and Pound did not claim to have presented more than a fraction of the evidence which choked history's lumber-rooms. But in Canto XLVI he said the case was drawing to a conclusion, and with it the first part of the first phase of the *Cantos*. The prosecutor was ending; but it was only in irony that he could ask, "Will any jury convict 'um?" Of course no jury would, nor would any sensitive or discriminating person. No matter how they were arranged, the facts did not prove the inherent evil of loans at interest, which, like any other human institution, may serve for good or for evil. And the facts lay about in hopeless, deliberate disarray. The miracle of the matter was that the prosecutor and his

staff still had the crust to label their incoherence the "scientific method." There was, of course, nothing by the remotest construction scientific about this unsystematic, anti-rational Bohemianism; but the way in which Pound and his fellow-travellers arrived at this conclusion was so typical that it is worth a brief inspection.

The method of the ideogram, so the argument went, is anti-Aristotelian; it is founded upon the particular, not the generalized fact. The method of science "builds its hypotheses by observation and re-observation of what has taken place and is taking place." Therefore science is anti-Aristotelian too, just like the ideogram. Further proof of this fact is the assertion that laboratory experimenters work effectively because — unbeknownst to themselves — they are "in the spirit of the ideogram," while the social sciences are backward because they have fallen victim to moribund abstractions. From inaccuracy to irrelevancy to absurdity, the argument thus runs its merry way. The schoolboy error of supposing that, since scientific method makes much of checking hypotheses and generalizations, it must therefore be hostile to them, is balanced by a superlative vagueness as to what "the method of the ideogram" is in the first place. Seemingly, one can use it without knowing about it. Nowhere in the writings of Pound, his disciples, or interpreters is it clearly defined; nowhere is the phrase used in accordance with even hazy definitions. What, after all, can the method be? If it bans all abstractions, we must somehow dispose of the abstractions. "usury," "ideogram," and "abstraction." If it bars only certain particular abstractions, or certain approaches to abstractions, the rule must be accurately defined before it can even be discussed. In default of any such definition, the "method of the ideogram" remains only a pretentious and ill-considered way of trying to reform language. Doubly suspect, in itself, and in the conclusions it sanctifies, it clearly expresses the rationalized mania of a man whom our age has disinherited of his calling, his language, and his reason.

### III

When Julien Benda, in a seminal volume, attacked the "treason of the clerks," he had in mind the defection of the educated classes from the integrity of their disciplines, and their capitulation to popular democracy. But to remain loyal to one's caste and one's discipline, as Benda urged, might also be a form of betrayal. Whichever way one turned, the facts underlying Benda's protest were plain. Popular as-



pirations and traditional culture were, and are today, profoundly out of sympathy. Doubtless, the gap was in part illusory. Much of its apparent growth was simply due to the growth of literacy. When only clerks could read and write, the very existence of popular culture was easily overlooked. Still, political democracy and free public education have undeniably cut much ground from under the feet of traditional exponents of traditional culture. The clerk who feels himself to be living in a wasteland of vulgarians, preserving sparks of culture against a looming, hostile environment, has in large measure judged the situation aright. But what then? The closer one clutches culture to one's private bosom, the more measly does the wretched infant grow. If one lets it out to play with the boys, its values are debased and its sensibilities blunted, but culture is at least a living body, capable of acting in and on life. The first attitude is avowedly exclusive, inward, and aristocratic; it leads one straight into the mental and emotional cul-de-sac of the hermetic pose. The second, though it can be used to justify the commercial, the vulgar, and the second-rate, aims higher, I think, in the end. But Pound, Eliot, Auden, and the Symbolist movement generally, took the first turning. Having despaired of finding a sympathetic popular audience in the contemporary world, they looked ever further into the past for inspiration, and simultaneously allied themselves with one or another authoritarian movement, which offered to intellectuals the rewards of power without the obligations of democracy. They carried with them few writers of fiction; and the work of those writers was for the most part a fiction of ideas or moods, curiously devoid of characters, situations, plots, or actions. Lyric poetry and criticism made up the mass of Symbolist writing, and the criticism was in general more bold and aware than the verse. At least a few of the critics saw and made no attempt to deny that their attitude toward life was vindictive and neurotic. They defended their position only on the grounds that it was necessary, without trying to pretend it was desirable. On these grounds, they had a good case to make.

For the hermetic attitude may indeed be necessary today, for some artists under some circumstances. What Pound has so often said is surely true, that to create works of imaginative integrity in and for today's society is almost impossible, at least under commercial auspices. If America's popular culture is not entirely degenerate, it is well on its way to becoming so. Terrorization of the nation's mental life proceeds apace; the straitjacket of fear, ignorance, and indifference is

squeezing the last elements of dissent and variety from American existence. No sensitive person can look upon the mentality represented — at a random sampling — by Committees of Congress, the profession of journalism, Hollywood, the Book-of-the-Month Club, and President Harry S. Truman, without feeling that the age of the rampant moron is upon us. Fools have been fools since the world began, but asininity has rarely been better rewarded than in our time and our land, nor has intelligence been more suspect. Mass production, centralization, standardization, and the secret government of money, combined with the irresponsibility of large-scale political democracy, have whittled America down to the measure of the mental seven-year-old. The process involves cultural degradation on a massive scale; and such degradation must be profoundly depressing to the artist, who is driven to feel that his own kind are the only ones who understand him.

Yet, granted all this, one thing remains clear, that the creation of a fairer opportunity will not be accomplished by a set of artistic spiders, spinning lacy patterns out of their own bowels. Even if they ally themselves with scorpions, I don't think the spiders are on the right track. The dream of a worthwhile popular culture may possibly be fugitive and Utopian, and art may perhaps be, necessarily, the work of a cultured aristocracy. But I don't think this has been proved yet. Even if it were proved, I don't think it can be shown that all aristocracies must be vindictive and neurotic. Some artistic aristocracies have exercised a major influence on popular art of their days, and have been gratified to involve their roots in the soil of popular culture. Some have even created popular art themselves.

Indeed, the crassness of current American popular culture might almost be called peculiar, and the gap between traditional and popular cultures exceptional. Other times and lands are hard put to match us. The Rome of 100 A.D. and the Britain of 1750 perhaps come closest. For America is now an empire of full-blown prosperity; and an empire in the days of its pride is notoriously apt to be crude and crass in its public morals. The peculiarly aloof and inward isolation of the intellectual, under these circumstances, is actually a function of his blowsy environment. When reason, language, authority, and all the avenues of public expression have been captured by hostile powers, the writer naturally turns in upon himself. Examples widely separate prove the trend. In the submarine genius of Cowper and Blake are many parallels with the disinherited talents of Yeats and Pound. Hart Crane was a passionate, frustrated systematizer like



Lucretius. Eliot, who has made exile his home, and centered his thinking on other-worldly values, has deliberately formed his style, his method, and his philosophy on the model of the disinherited aristocrat. The world of Kafka, like that of the late Greek romancers, is one of constant surprise, frustration, and unreality. In all these examples, constant elements recur. The private values aggressively asserted, the representations distorted by interior connotations, the recurrent themes of frustration and failure, all represent parallel reactions to parallel conditions. The convenient adjective to sum up the whole tendency is "Byzantine." Despite various special connotations, it will represent — no adjective better — the fundamental attitude of the Yeats-Eliot-James-Pound-Kafka, *Partisan-Review*, Burnham-and-brimstone school of literary politics. Like so many eccentric circles, the figures by whom the school is defined are never wholly congruent, but all bisect a general area of agreement. No more eccentric, no more wide-swinging than the others, though of slightly different bias, is the orbit of Ezra Pound. His basic neurosis has been that of being an American intellectual in the 20th Century. The sincerity with which he has organized that neurosis is responsible for his seeming, and being, a madman. Among those who share his bias, it is quite properly a mark of distinction. But would not his vast energies and genuine talents have been better occupied in combatting, rather than organizing the disease?

#### IV

As a favorite example of devoted integrity, Ezra Pound once chose the heartfelt declaration of an Italian Fascist, "We'll die for Mussolini." Sincere and altruistic the remark may well have been, by private standards. But the man who could not see that it represented sincere and altruistic devotion to a brutal, corrupt, and prententious ideal needed more and better values if he were to be a responsible citizen, let alone a cultural leader. An attitude toward human beings more warm, compassionate, and understanding might have been found in Italian popular art, had anyone thought to look there. But the author of *Fontamara* was too dangerous a man for Mussolini's Italy, and the talent which was to become responsible for a movie like *Open City* lay buried under the vulgar banalities of the Fascist Empire. Ezra Pound, denying that this talent was in the people, did not want to see it uncovered. Was he simply irresponsible? Not altogether. He was out to defend Western culture from those who would defile it by using it, by partaking of it. In a war which we fought to save the

people of Europe from those strong-minded defenders of Western culture, the stormtroopers of Nuremberg, he was quite properly a traitor. Whether or not one considered them usurpers in the main, Pound and the psychopathic stormtroopers did lay legitimate claim to at least one part of the Western cultural tradition. It was that part, deriving from the writings of Plato, the core of which is embodied in the saying of Scotus, "Authority is based on right reason." By emphasizing the authority conferred on a cultured few through abstract standards, this viewpoint elevates the "reason" (authority) of those few above the "reason" (rationality) of the many. An impressive devotion to civilized values is manifest in those who thus declare that people exist only to serve the ends of culture. But the core of the position is treason, savagery, and the betrayal of that public universal discipline which is mankind's only solid ground of culture, authority, or secure judgment. For when the reason of a few becomes an unchecked authority over many, the liberties of all are swallowed up in force or fraud.

Ezra Pound is committed, not only to this form of authoritarianism, but to standards for discriminating between right reason and wrong reason which are moonshine-mad. Between the authority maintained and the standards adduced to maintain it is a relation not, perhaps, necessary, but very intimate. Rationality just will not serve the ends of authoritarian aristocracies any more. The ferocious exclusivism of Action Francaise and the pervasive snobbery of Anglo-Saxonism are no more defensible on rational grounds than the totalitarian outlook of Pound, Mussolini, or Hitler. Hence the fringes of the would-be elite now undertake to do their thinking with concepts of faith, race, authority, Hindu mysticism, tradition, ideograms, or other non-logical schemata. Like the machine-breakers of early 19th-century England, they have discovered society's disease, but mistaken the growing and healthy tissue for the tumor. Amid the general wreckage and wastage of our time, no men require our understanding and few deserve our pity more than these, who from a true and valid insight have derived only a forlorn and cankerous doctrine.



# WILLARD MAAS:

## In the Tower Two Angels Hold My Hands

The running shadow that crosses the heart, dismal  
 Echo that is forever saying goodbye;  
 Tree out of whose branches never the animal  
 Of ashes spreads wings of fire to fly;  
 Fortune, I hold in my hand, the marble  
 Face whose lips are parted to die.

Californian sea that was yesterday, sea  
 Here that is today, how far away  
 Is Birnham wood and the blood I used to be.  
 Woman with the double face that held the day  
 Of murder and the night of embraces, she  
 Like the gold head of the harp is music far away.

The sleeper-boy in his dreams of eagles and lilies  
 Saw the Northern prince whose brain  
 Crawled spiders, in the web of the kisses  
 Rose with butcher knives, while the leaves of pain  
 Put forth the terrible tendrils of denials:  
 Power of the Christ-bloom, the fairy-bird gone.

The black Czarina with the great nipples of blue diamonds  
 Stretched out as white as the Siberian night,  
 Opening the gates of her arms to warm Crimean gardens.  
 The beard of the savage soldier glittered with sweat  
 Caught in the curls. Two lions and two fawns  
 Slept in the ferns and the poppies growing at their feet.

Far away, far away, sweet brother, far away,  
 Yesterday, yesterday, far away mother,  
 The hot snake coiled on the Sierran stone, the dead  
 Holding the past that will not stir.  
 Pine-cones tied to the bones, the blood  
 Rings in the skull with the bells of December.

The woman with the dove in her breast and the boy  
 With the flower in his hand stand at the door  
 That swings to happiness, bar the way  
 To Elysium with a sword and a star.  
 It is the face of Love, the joy  
 That is there in the mask forbidding the tear.

The nightly visitor is the statue  
 Of the headless hero. The stone eyes  
 Bleed eternally from their lost blue.  
 In the tower two angels hold my hands while rises  
 The poison sea up to the locked window  
 Where snow like darkness falls from the eyes.

## MASON JORDAN MASON:

### Chanty

Lordy  
 the wing is pale

Christmas came  
 and likewise went

But the crippled angel  
 has snot on her nose  
 and the blue fiddle wanes

Woe is a wolf  
 with fearful mane

Christmas is gone  
 but it will come back sometime



## Queen Gramophone

Circe ate of crackling bread  
her shoes the finest pig

But Circe had a lonesome bed  
and the night was a lonesome year

She hung her heart on a toothsome peg  
and brushed her hair with his quill

She ate blood pudding fit to pop  
but her bed was a barren hell

## One Restless Coot

Went it was down the drain  
and the morning was walpurgis  
in the twelfth month  
of the wanderjahr

Came it went  
less than the sun  
the sowing is likewise completed  
for this brief little while  
done in dimmerdread  
gone

like that  
restless more so than the moon

But this a wind in my ear  
hare, hare  
the yellow hounds bellow

All the pussy  
and all the beer

Bitter and gone  
the goon  
is in the underblows

# VERNON WATKINS:

## Birthday Sleep

Sleep, these ancient hours,  
While the reapers thresh.  
Sleep, first of flowers,  
Infant of this flesh:  
The hills for you shall leap,  
Winding rivers flash,  
Jerusalem rejoice,  
And the mountain-ash  
Move above your sleep.  
Move above your sleep.

Great the mystery stands  
Over the dumb trees;  
Gift of buried hands  
Whom no eye can see  
Yet the sages love,  
Rest within her silk,  
For the moving breast  
Cannot give you milk  
Till you hear the dove,  
Till you hear the dove.

Then this giant weight  
Vessel of her womb,  
Birth will indicate  
Falling through the loom  
Near the reapers' sound,  
Heaven and Earth in dance  
Moving, as the babe  
Leapt with radiance  
And our life was found,  
And our life was found,  
Where knees touched the ground,  
Where knees touched the ground.

# DANIEL CURLEY:

## Saccovanzetti

The council of war said, Today you'll have to be Saccovanzetti by yourself. We don't have enough in it for there to be two. So, Micky, you have to be Saccovanzetti and you have to hold up the factory and you have to be dead at the end. Remember you have to be dead. You can kill the paymaster but at the end you have to be dead.

It seemed to Micky that he always had to be dead. All his life he was always being dead. Nine years old — 1927 minus 1918 gives nine — well almost nine, nine in October, and always dead. He looked down from the top of the sandpit across the glass-smooth pond where the cows stood knee deep in water and mud, up the long cool slope of the pasture and the old orchard, to the pine grove.

"OK," he said, "I'll be Saccovanzetti." He looked back at the group which had imperceptibly formed opposite him, drawing itself together and leaving him by himself. He looked away from the pond and pasture and wood and looked at the group — his brother Ed, Bobby Miller, and Don Conlin — and then he looked to his right at the level stretch of sand between him and the thicket that sloped down to the pond. He knew that after he killed the paymaster he would have to hide out in the thicket and try to outwit and outshoot those who could not be outwitted and outshot.

The loose sand near the entrance to the thicket was marked with signs of his death struggles of yesterday when he had been a German. The others liked to see him die because he died so well and so violently, because he seemed to put everything he had into dying, leaping into the the air and falling or falling in his tracks without ever putting out his hands (the sand was soft).

"OK," he said, "where will the shoe factory be?"

"In the basement of the old burned school," his brother Ed said. "Don will be the paymaster."

"Not me," Don said. "I don't want to be shot."

"Just for a minute," Ed said. "As soon as he starts his getaway you can be the one who calls the good guys, and then you can be one of the good guys who goes after him."

"OK," Don said, "but I don't see why I have to be shot all the time."



"Do you have a handkerchief to put over your face?" Ed said.

"No," Micky said.

"Give him your cowboy bandanna, Bobby," Ed said.

"Here," Bobby said, "don't lose it."

"Don't worry." Bobby, of course, should have been the bad guy: he had the bandanna. Micky began to tie the bandanna around his face. The policemen were getting into the police station — the same craterlike depression that had been the shellhole yesterday from which the doughboys had slaughtered the Germans as they came out of Belleau Wood. The paymaster was in his office counting money and glancing up every now and then apprehensively.

Saccovanzetti dropped over the edge of the sandpit and crept along the slope just below the top until he was sure he had between him and the paymaster a large bush growing inside the old foundation. Then he eased himself over the top and crawled toward the bush. The policemen watched him intently, but since no one had called them they could do nothing. As he rounded the bush the paymaster's head appeared over the old foundation. The paymaster was looking the other way. Saccovanzetti pushed his pistol forward and fired it an inch from the back of the paymaster's head. The paymaster yelled, whirled, and drew his pistol firing twice.

"I got you," Saccovanzetti said. "Drop dead. You never knew what hit you." With extremely bad grace the paymaster sat on the ground. Saccovanzetti leaped into the office and began scooping up the money. He climbed out of the office and ran toward the thicket. He could hear someone in the office frantically telephoning the police.

The police were streaming out of the police station as he ran past, but since they had first to go to the scene of the crime to investigate they had no way of knowing that he was the killer.

He sprang into the wide funnel-like opening to the thicket and took the path branching off to the right. He ran along the spine of the hill with the pond glimmering before him through the trees and the thin air of the cut-away hill on his right hand.

When he reached the place where the path dropped sharply down to the pond, he stopped and listened. He could hear nothing except the rasping of his breath and the pounding of a pulse in his throat. To get a better look back over the path he began to climb a small tree at the edge of the pit with its roots on one side reaching dryly down into sterile air. From a little way up the tree he could see Ed and Bobby and Don just running into the thicket. Without stopping they

turned down the path he had taken. That was just luck — good for them, bad for him. There was no way they could tell he had come that way, for the sand everywhere was pocked with footmarks from one day to another.

Before he could get down from the tree he heard them running along the path, and before he could even think of flattening himself among the branches, they ran directly under him close together, straining forward like hounds on a scent. He held his pistol in readiness but he did not shoot although he could have shot all three of them like fish in a barrel: he was supposed to die, not they. He knew that if he started shooting they would groan and grimace and shoot him like a bird in a tree and he'd be dead. He wished that for once he could be a good guy so that when he got shot like a fish in a barrel he could get up clutching his shoulder or his side or his head, grimacing with pain, more dead than alive, but carrying on and eventually winning and, if there were girls in the game, having his head bathed and stroked in the hospital. When girls played there were always more wounded than killed outright, though sometimes the girls liked to have you die in the hospital so they could have a funeral for you.

He waited a minute. When he jumped down from the tree he dropped his gun, and as he was looking for it among the bushes he heard them coming back. He flattened on the ground not five feet from the path, his face pressed down so that it would not show white among the leaves.

"He must have gone the other way," Bobby said. They had stopped beside the tree.

"Maybe he's up this tree," Don said. He fired twice into the branches and stepped close to the trunk to look up.

Micky held his gun on Ed's head and waited, the taste of metal strong in his mouth and his sweaty body cold against the ground.

"Come on," Ed said. "We'll go back and take the other path. Let's not let him get too big of a start."

Micky rested his head on his arm and sank back against the ground, weak in the reaction. Then he got up and ran down the hill toward the pond. With one quick bound he was across the path that paralleled the pond about fifteen feet up the last precipitous slope. He sprang down to the narrow beach and huddled against the bank. He clutched his side for the pain of running and thought that he would be unable to move again and that he would have to meet them there by the pond and shoot it out hopelessly there with those who could not be killed. He waited.

Gradually the pain left his side, his pulse quieted, his breathing eased; and he knew that he could not stay there pinned against the bank. Sooner or later they would get around the corner of the pond and see him from the railroad embankment and pick him off sitting. He began to work along the edge of the pond away from the railroad. The narrow beach narrowed even further as he approached a point of land that jutted slightly into the pond.

The steep bank became steeper and dropped straight down into the water. Soon he was walking in the rapidly deepening water, and it was becoming increasingly obvious that he would never be able to reach the point. He stood in the water, his gun held high, and stared out over the pond. They passed on the path overhead while he flattened against the bank, hidden by the steep bank and the leaves. He tasted the dry metallic taste again, and his shirt clung cold to his back.

They went away. They had not yet thought of the pond. Sooner or later they would think of the pond. They would go all through the thicket and then they would think of the pond. He had to move.

The best thing to do would be to go on to the dam, climb down the dam to the river bed, and get clean away. That would be the best thing. But the pond was too deep and the bank was too steep; so there was nothing to do but go back and climb up to the path. He could follow the path to the other side of the point and then get down to the pond again.

He started back along the beach. He could hear them shouting in the thicket, and he realized that he would never get ten yards along the path.

Perhaps he could go in the other direction over the tracks. For a moment he looked at the nearby railroad embankment, but it was so high, so bare, so lonely that he knew he could never get across to the safety of the other side.

And then he found the raft. When he had gone down the beach before, he had walked right over it because it had been covered with branches. He had thought it was a tree fallen down into the water. But now when he needed it he found the raft.

He pushed the raft into the water. He found that it was level and dry only if he stood exactly in the center. If he moved or shifted his weight suddenly, the raft tipped and water sloshed across it. He worked cautiously up to the point, staying always as close as possible to the bank. Then he stopped poling and allowed the raft to drift almost imperceptibly until he could see around the point.



This he knew was the crucial moment. He had to get the raft in motion, and he had to steer its unwieldy bulk around the point. And just when he would most need his eyes to scan the bank for them, he would have to devote his entire attention to the raft. He gave a violent push with the pole. The raft jerked forward, tipping slightly. The water sloshed into his shoes.

Then he was in the wide open at the point. He felt for the bottom with his pole, but the water was too deep. He hung there like a duck on the water. He knelt down and paddled with his hands, glancing continually over his shoulder, expecting any minute to hear gunfire from the bank. Although the raft had seemed to hang motionless, he found, when he began trying to paddle, that it continued to drift farther from the shore. He paddled frantically. His arms ached with the effort, but at last the raft appeared to stand still.

If it had been difficult to check the motion of the raft, it was even more difficult to start it off in a new direction. His arms were too tired to keep up the sustained paddling needed to get under sluggish way. He sat on the edge of the raft and kicked with his feet — he was soaked to the waist anyway. When he turned to look at the bank, he saw that he was perceptibly closer. He felt with the pole for the bottom, found it, and pushed himself into the bank.

That had been luck, he thought, to get around the point without being seen. He sat for a minute in the middle of the raft holding onto a bush to keep from drifting away. When he was out there in the open, he had felt that if only he could get to the bank he would be safe, but now at the bank, he knew that he must keep moving down to the dam.

He stood up and started poling. It had been some time since he heard them. Perhaps they were up on top of the sand pit or by the railroad. He poled easily along and beached the raft beside the dam. He leaped from the raft to the bank. He sprang to the top of the narrow bank and for a moment saw the steep sliding path down to the groove of the river bed below the dam. For an instant he was poised gathering himself for the path down. From all sides deafening gunfire and close at hand. His heart stopped, his pulse exploded, and he fell to the ground.

"OK, Saccovanzetti," his brother Ed said, "get up. We filled you full of lead and now we're going to take you to Dedham for the trial."

"I'm going to be Judge Thayer," Bobby Miller said.

"No, I'm going to be Judge Thayer," Don Conlin said. "I had

to be the paymaster and be shot. "I got to have something good."

"You be Judge Thayer, Don," Ed said. "Bobby, you can be District Attorney Katzman. I'm going to be Governor Fuller, and President Lowell of Harvard and Attorney General Palmer."

"Aw," Don said, "what do you say? When you're those guys you always mess everything up."

In the distance a shrill whistle like a police whistle blew two long and one short. "They want us for supper," Ed said. "You're going to catch it, Micky, for getting your clothes soaked."

"I don't care," Micky said. He was sitting on the ground trying to catch his breath.

"You better care," Ed said.

"How come you found me?" Micky said.

"We were up on top of the sand pit and we saw the ripples out in the pond," Ed said.

"We figured it was you," Don said, "so we came down and followed you along the shore."

"I never saw you," Micky said. He stood up and they all started for home.

"We didn't see you either," Ed said. "We just followed the ripples."

"How come you tried to really get away?" Bobby said.

"You must be crazy," Don said. "Don't you know Saccovanzetti never gets away?"

They went on home, Micky knowing all the way that he would really catch it. When they went into the house Micky could smell the mingled supper smells. It seemed to him that there was a chocolate cake in there somewhere.

"Oh, Micky, Micky," his mother said, "what have you done now?"

"I fell in the pond when we were playing Saccovanzetti," he said. He looked at Ed, but Ed said nothing and went on up to their room.

"George, come here and look at this boy," his mother said.

He could hear his father getting up in the other room. The paper rustled loudly. His father came to the door, the paper held in his hand.

"Speak to him, George. Tell him he mustn't play that horrid game." His mother turned back to the stove.

"What now, son?" his father said.

"I was playing Saccovanzetti and I fell in the pond," Micky said.

"There's no need to tell him not to play that game any more, Grace," his father said. "They're going to the chair tonight."

"Yeah?" Micky said. His mother crossed herself quickly and went

on with her left hand taking the chocolate cake out of the oven.

"This time for sure," his father said.

"Good," Micky said, "they had it coming."

"Don't be so bloodthirsty, son," his father said.

"You said so yourself," Micky said.

"I know," his father said. "But now we have more important business to attend to. A desperate criminal who has fallen into the pond and is wet and exhausted can't very well be sent to bed without supper, but he can and should be sent to bed directly after supper and without chocolate cake. Not only without chocolate cake tonight but also without chocolate cake as long as this cake shall last."

"Run now and get washed up," his mother said.

"You might as well get into your night clothes now," his father said.

Micky ran up the stairs. It hadn't been really bad. He was tired, much too tired to go out after supper. "Ed," he called. "Saccovanzetti are getting it tonight."

"Yeah?" Ed said. He was sitting on the toilet.

"Yeah," Micky said. "You're Saccovanzetti in the electric chair. I'm the warden and I'm going to throw the switch." He reached behind Ed and flushed the toilet. A look of frustrate rage blazed on Ed's face. Micky ran laughing to their room.

---

## CONTRIBUTORS

ROBERT M. ADAMS is on the faculty of Rutgers University and has contributed critical articles to several journals.

DANIEL CURLEY, whose first story appeared in *ACCENT* in 1947, teaches English at Syracuse University.

WILLARD MAAS teaches at Long Island University. He is the author of *Fire Testament* and *Concerning the Young*.

MASON JORDAN MASON lives in Waco, where Scott Greer of the Motive Book Shop is engaged in publishing all his work to date.

WILLIAM SANSOM, England's most active young short story writer, has had three collections published since the war. His first novel, as well as a book of travel episodes in Italy and Corsica, will appear in 1949.

JOHN WALLER, whose poetry was introduced to American readers in *ACCENT* in 1942, spent most of the war years, as did Keith Douglas, in the Near East. Only one collection of his poems, *Crusade*, has so far been published in the United States.

VERNON WATKINS lives in South Wales. American readers will find a selection of his poems in the current *New Directions* list. He has made many translations from the German, including the whole of Heine's *North Sea*.

VERNON A. YOUNG of Tucson is preparing a critical survey of Southwest literature, parts of which will appear in *New Mexico Quarterly*.



# JOHN WALLER:

## The Poetry of Keith Douglas

Gregorio Prieto in his collection of drawings "Students: Oxford and Cambridge" has one entitled "Poet," depicting a young man asleep on the grass with his head resting on a pile of books; as he breathes, small tinsel-like stars float softly out of the carrier basket attached to the handlebars of his bicycle, dropping over the young man's body, several hovering over his face and one even paused gently above his open lips as if the next breath will blow it upwards again. The poet's hair is untidy and seems almost to be growing into the books and into the ground. One can imagine a river passing alongside and its quiet murmuring. Indeed the whole scene is ominous in its peace-like quality. To look at it now is to remember an old Oxford friend, Keith Douglas, and that scorching ominous summer of 1940, when he wrote — before going into the army — his poem "Canoe."

Well, I am thinking this may be my last  
summer, but cannot lose even a part  
of pleasure in the old fashioned art  
of idleness. I cannot stand aghast

at whatever doom hovers in the background;  
while grass and buildings and the somnolent river,  
who know they are allowed to last for ever,  
exchange between them the whole subdued sound

of this hot time. What sudden fearful fate  
can deter my shade wandering next year  
from a return? Whistle and I will hear  
and come another evening when this boat

travels with you alone towards Iffley:  
as you lie looking up for thunder again,  
this cool touch does not betoken rain;  
it is my spirit that kisses your mouth lightly.

After joining the army and getting commissioned Keith Douglas was posted to the Middle East where he ran away from a staff job at base to join his regiment in the desert, fought in a Crusader tank from Alamein to Zem Zem, and returned safely to England — only to be killed a few days after the beginning of the Second Front, on

his third day in Normandy. The vagaries and delays of modern British publishing have resulted in his first book — excluding group productions — being published in England only three years after his death, at a time when the things he wrote about have begun to be forgotten.

*Alamein to Zem Zem* is not just another soldier's diary to be sympathized over and given that sympathetic pat on the back that the critic symbolically gives to the dead; it is foremost a poet's diary in which the poet was only incidentally a soldier. The book also contains drawings, two of which in colour portray with stark force and jovial satire respectively a man burning to death in his tank ("cannot get out of the turret") and a Cairo Street scene — and a handful of poems written in the Middle East. (The latter are not, as the blurb suggests, the whole of Douglas' Middle East poetry, for they omit at least three significant poems lying still in Middle East magazines or anthologies, but it is to be hoped that all will eventually be included in his forthcoming collection *Bête Noire*.)

The poems are of primary importance. It is late in the day now to discover a war poet, but when the publication of the work is so long delayed so also must be any acknowledgment. And to those who had previously read these poems — apart from the Editor of *Poetry London*, mainly other writers who had seen them in the Middle East — Keith Douglas appeared the finest or at any rate one of the three finest poets *in* the war, the other two being Alun Lewis and Sidney Keyes. As with Edward Thomas, Rupert Brooke, and Wilfred Owen in the 1914-18 war, it is a matter for sorrow that all three were killed in action. It is the last of these perhaps, Wilfred Owen, that Keith Douglas most nearly approximates.

But to return to Prieto's picture of the dreaming young man. That appearance of dreaming is the first impression to be received from Douglas' poetry, his earlier poems notably. I once said that he was an "ivory tower" poet and that he very rarely left his tower, at which another writer remarked wittily that by that he supposed me to mean that Douglas did not get brilliantly drunk at bottle parties. Yet I did not intend a criticism. There is nothing wrong in an ivory tower if you can get a good view from it and Douglas' view was always exact and comprehensive. "My object," he once wrote in a letter to a friend, "is to write true and significant things in words which work for their keep." So, he never shirked the true and significant things in warfare, he wrote only one poem and that satirical without actually having experienced a battle, he was like Owen an extremely ef-

ficient officer — and yet, with all this, his work gives an impression of an ivory tower being taken into action, of a dreamer on battlefields, and Douglas' pity is the more piercing for being that macabre and ghostly pity of dreams. "This is what I see," he seems to say, "yet why should I feel it when I shall wake up shortly?" And yet he does feel it, because there is no such awaking. It is a way of avoiding sentimentality, of never being caught out in the standardized war poem, Mark I, II, or III.

Compare the early "Canoe" with his "Elegy to an 88 Gunner," written in Tripolitania in 1943.

Three weeks gone and the combatants gone  
returning over the nightmare ground  
we found the place again and found  
the soldier sprawling in the sun.

The frowning barrel of his gun  
overshadows him. As we came on  
that day, he hit my tank with one  
like the entry of a demon.

And smiling in the gunpit spoil  
is a picture of his girl  
who has written: "*Steffi, Vergissmeini*"  
in a copybook Gothic script.

We see him almost with content,  
abased and seeming to have paid,  
mocked by his durable equipment  
that's hard and good when he's decayed.

But she would weep to see today  
how on his skin the swart flies move,  
the dust upon the paper eye  
and the burst stomach like a cave.

For here the lover and the killer are mingled  
who had one body and one heart  
and Death who had the soldier singled  
has done the lover mortal hurt.

It is as if the fact that Douglas was also an artist gave him always an artist's impersonal eye and enabled him to pass through scenes of bloodshed and death with a poetic disembodiment or unconcern that made the dead and the dying merely figures in a landscape. Where the décor is a horrible tracery of iron the dead men appear



to wriggle in their dowdy clothes. And the question is raised: is this really pity or is it again that streak of sadism or delight in pain that pierces so often the poetry of Sidney Keyes? Yet it is pity, — my futile mercy that I drop from my tower, the poet might say, from the turret of my tank as I go by.

His method is clearly stated. When someone in his regiment had his leg destroyed by an 88 shell and was taken away to an ambulance where he died later, Douglas overheard him to cry petulantly: "It's most unfair — they've shot my foot off." And he wrote:

How can I live among this gentle  
obsolescent breed of heroes and not weep?

Yet weeping does not help, for in weeping is sentimentality and in sentimentality is bad art and its inward squirm. It is better therefore to write it in another, more roundabout way, as if it was only another game at school.

These plains were their cricket pitch  
and in the mountains the tremendous drop fences  
brought down some of the runners. Here  
under the stones and earth they dispose themselves  
in famous attitudes of unconcern.

So Douglas' becomes the famous pity of apparent unconcern, which is both elegiac and striking. Around it "the separative glass cloak" (which he had earlier mentioned in his first version of the poem "Syria") protects it from shrillness and silliness and tears. He hated anything artificial. He liked emotion to happen, not to be raised. And strangely in this way he was able to couple so much stark reality with so much beauty and elegance.

Other poems in *Alamein to Zem Zem* lead off to the quietly descriptive and even to the quietly satirical. The sunlit idyll of Mersah Matruh is made ominous by the "logical little fish" who nip at the flesh of the soldier bathing in the sea:

imagining I am one of the dead.

Christodoulos, who makes money out of the troops, is:

the original wise one  
from whose experiments they told  
how War can be the famous stone  
for turning rubbish into gold.

There is a fine perfected description of the Garden Groppis between Sharia Adly Pasha and Sharia Malika Farida under the title "Behavior of Fish in an Egyptian Tea-Garden." Yet all these are the background to that other world of the decaying figures and the fighting tanks, which is why a poem of Douglas' called "Cairo Jag" rings true where a similar poem by someone else strikes only faintly or does not ring at all. After all, there is no difference spiritually between a Cairo Jag and any other type of Jag if the desert does not follow it.

Shall I get drunk or cut myself a piece of cake?

You think of the girls, the evening, the lights, the drinks in cafés, the friends who must be forced into becoming acquaintances. You are led to the slumbrous afternoon, then to the roaring shrieking evening streets of Cairo, the beggars, the women with brown paper breasts, dust and ordure, the cripples whose legs have been cut off by the trams. And "it is all one, all as you have heard." For a day's travelling brings you to a new world, there quietly to enjoy that macabre peace again or furious activity, among:

the dead themselves, their boots, clothes and possessions  
clinging to the ground. A man with no head  
has a packet of chocolate and a souvenir of Tripoli.

Keith Douglas was constantly a poet of naturalness. Although he himself appeared in *New Verse* at the age of fifteen while still a schoolboy at Christ's Hospital, he always attacked — perhaps unfairly — the trend towards obscurity which he felt *New Verse* represented. He allied himself more with the Georgians, their lyricism, their grace, and their elegance. Yet he had also this naturalness, this true view that the Georgian poets never had, the lack of which makes so much of their poetry artificial. Douglas could not only see clearly, he could also write clearly, and without throwing over completely that poetic tradition which so many young poets scorn. He belonged to no school and in his bookcase Edmund Blunden lay alongside T. S. Eliot, for he found merit in both. Where he uses intellect or philosophy it is to produce emotion or effect, not for their own ends. And so he wrote what is by any judgment a poem and he was a natural poet, simply himself. I can say no more of anyone.

On almost the last occasion when I met him in Cairo Keith Douglas remarked that he thought Richard Hillary's *The Last Enemy* an overrated book because it was too exhibitionist. It seemed to him to be so obviously written for a general public, and yet at the

same time wickedly desirous of seeming sincere. Remembering this is to turn to Douglas' own war-time journal, *Alamein to Zem Zem*, with a certain interest. But there is no attempt to emulate Hillary. Douglas may start at roughly the same point, but he travels almost at once in a different direction. There is no philosophizing which may not sound quite true to someone who has experienced the same ordeal; there is no easy flashiness or story; whatever Douglas has done he has not written a best seller. And yet I feel he may have written a work of literature about war.

He writes still as the observing dreamer. "I observed these battles partly as an exhibition — that is to say that I went through them a little like a visitor from the country going to a great show, or like a child in a factory — a child sees the brightness and efficiency of steel machines and endless belts slapping round and round, without caring or knowing what it is all there for. When I could order my thoughts I looked for more significant things than appearances; I still looked — I cannot avoid it — for something decorative, poetic or dramatic." He saw men living in an unnatural, dangerous, but not wholly terrible world, having to kill and be killed, and yet moved by a feeling of comradeship for their enemies who had experienced the same emotions and disasters. "It is tremendously illogical — to read about it cannot convey the impression of having walked through the looking-glass which touches a man entering a battle." And yet Douglas does manage to convey this feeling.

This De Quincey touch, this seeming to walk through that looking-glass, to seek out and find that illogicality which lies hidden in existence, has often seemed to produce the finest English prose where the writer has been writing about himself. "So, then, I said, I have found you at last," to take one very striking example. And so Douglas, and the house of Milena in Rouchdy Pasha, where his feet subtly led him on a short visit to Alexandria. "The odd face, with its delicate bones and nobility of line, the twisted smile and curious sad dishonest eyes; and her sinuous and cleanly made body, like a drawing made with an airbrush; her absurd accent; all beat down my fortitude when she confronted me." And yet Milena scarcely exists, slips into a few hundred words only, and then vanishes, as Anne does in *The Confessions of an Opium Eater*.

And on the extensions of this parallel, to hold up against all those odd illogical characters and episodes in De Quincey which critics have questioned the existence of and regarded as inspired by opium, there are in Douglas similar beings and incidents. Where others might



only have seen an eccentric major or a martinet colonel, the first was to Douglas a feudal legend looking upon the men of his regiment as if they were his tenants, sub-tenants, and serfs, wearing a flannel shirt and brown stock pinned with a gold pin, a yellow suede waistcoat lined with sheep's wool, faun cavalry trousers, brown suede shoes, a highly polished peaked cap, the whole surmounted with a Boer War moustache which could be seen from the back, while the second appeared as a spruce, brave, pomaded figure, a man of astonishing tantrums known as "Picadilly Jim," whose only method of making an apology was to send by a messenger a quotation from Disraeli which he always attributed to Napoleon, and who was to die so typically, standing up in his tank and shaving under shell-fire. There are others too, the soldier whose spare issue of kit was always kept ready sewn up for those inspections which he confidently awaited in the glass-house for irregularities yet to be performed, the poor old hospital orderly who called out in a weak, quavering voice: "Oxo or tea, Oxo or tea," Willi, the young German prisoner who had lost his paybook, and the tank driver, standing nonchalantly against his tank and referring to his dead companions inside with the phrase, "Bit mucky in the turret," as if apologizing to an inspecting officer. And Douglas' stranger from the Orient is an American buck Negro who when asked the name of the town outside which he is mounting guard scratches himself and answers only after a tremendous pause: "Well, I *did* know but I done forgotten."

The small illogicalities, the minor surrealisms of life, are always there if only one can see them and the discovery of their comforting presences on battlefields is what makes the difference between a correspondent's account which is boring as soon as it is out of date and that of a poet and an artist. Douglas' diary is full of these wistfully bright moments. Owing to the fact that battledress trousers are supplied with sharp tin buttons which begin to cut themselves off as soon as they are sewn on, his main concern in one battle is to keep up his trousers only to have them fall about his legs when he has to report to his colonel. Once, halted for the night, he reads aloud to his fellow officers from Sacheverell Sitwell's *Valse des Fleurs*, finding them fascinated by the costumes and regiments taking part in the march-past before the Imperial Palace until they realize that there is no story to hang their attention on. Somewhere else the morphia turns out to be a preparation for waking people up under anaesthetic. And just outside Sousse he falls among a group of French officers who insist on his spending the night drinking toasts comprised of tumblers two-thirds

full of neat whisky, until all are unconscious and "the captain in the act of announcing another toast, fell backwards into a corner, where he lay, still crying his toast amiably, his eyes twinkling like harbour lights." Upon his return to his regiment the next morning, it is not surprising that a hen for which his driver has swapped a pair of khaki shorts lays two eggs without shells in the terrifying passage by truck over the hill roads.

Also in *Alamein to Zem Zem* will be found those nightmare yet dreamlike descriptions of the scenery of battle, which Douglas later translated into verse. The dead fascinated him. "The most impressive thing about the dead is their triumphant silence, proof against anything in the world." And he always described them differently. A dead Libyan soldier reminded him first of Paul Robeson and then of Rimbaud's "Le Dormeur du Val" and as he looked "a fly crawled up his cheek and across the dry pupil of his unblinking right eye." Dead Italians are described as lying about "like trippers taken ill." And a dead German appears in the form of a cleverly posed waxwork representing an orgasm of pain. "He seemed to move and writhe. But he was stiff. The dust which powdered his face like an actor's lay on his wide open eyes, whose stare held my gaze like the Ancient Mariner's."

Always Douglas paints a scene with a clear accurate view and then drives the point home by relating it to something not at all horrific. This technique can sometimes be brutal. Take the phrases "huge yellow vegetable" and "child exhausted with crying" and note their effect in this passage from his nightmare progress over the open desert after his own tank has been hit, after he has suddenly discovered the friendly Sherman tanks around him to be all burnt out with not a living soul in any of them, after a corporal with no right foot has mounted his back like an old man of the sea, and when trudging wearily onward, trying to avoid the enemy guns and the trip wires of mines, he comes across two wounded crawling along the sand. "I looked at the second man. Only his clothes distinguished him as a human being and they were badly charred. His face had gone: in place of it was a huge yellow vegetable. The eyes blinked in it, eyes without lashes, and a grotesque huge mouth dribbled and moaned like a child exhausted with crying."

The question of courage does not enter into Douglas' writing. He was always so much something else first, an artist, before being a soldier or a person, that he can write about episodes in which he behaved heroically by normal standards with almost complete detachment. It

is only afterwards that one thinks: that must have taken some doing. His descriptions of anything he did are so careful and yet at the same time so casual, that his diary reads for all the world like a new Alice gone to explore a new wonderland in which the scenery is unaccountably composed of strange flowers made by the dead and the dying and their broken machinery, and all the episodes have that surrealist glitter which seems to warn: "This is all a dream. Isn't it ridiculous?" And then reassuringly: "Remember all you can, for you'll wake up shortly." Douglas himself describes it as like being in a land unrelated to real life, like the scenes from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*.

To Keith Douglas the battlefield was an experience that he wanted to have and he ran away from a staff job to get it, but it was for artistic, not for heroic reasons, and that is what makes him worth reading. He once told me, after all the incidents described in his diary: "I don't need to do it again. When you've been in one battle you've been in all." He would, I think, at this point have been perfectly content to have stayed in staff jobs or even in the Ministry of Information for the rest of the war. But an officer who can take a battle with such cold, efficient, and ruthless detachment as Douglas' diary shows him to have done was obviously too valuable to be used for anything else. The cold detached man is more reliable than the hot hero, or to take a bad parallel Ulysses achieves more than Ajax. A true artist is from this point of view probably the most successful soldier in modern warfare if only he is efficient as Douglas — most rare for an artist — was, and if only he will always remain inwardly more of an artist than a person. Significantly Douglas admired the bombs falling from a plane, "an isolated shower of rain, a succession of glittering drops" before realizing the necessity of taking cover. And so, he did not need courage as others would have done; if ever he mentions personal fear it seems added as an afterthought, a conventional modesty. The "true significant things" were so interesting, so engrossing, that the emotions normally raised by danger had nowhere to make their home.

In a long "Monologue for a Cairo Evening" written just before departure from the Middle East and remembering so many of those happy or fated shadows who passed through Cairo during the war years, G. S. Fraser has a verse:

And Keith Douglas' shrewd and rustic eyes  
That had endured "the entry of a demon":  
His poems spat out shrapnel; and he lies  
Where all night long the Narrow Seas are screaming . . .



And I can discover no better epitaph, unless perhaps it be to remember that same sad serenity of Prieto's young poet by a river in Oxford in 1940, and the stars falling casually around. . .

---

## VERNON A. YOUNG

### Oscar Wilde's Fan

EDOUARD RODITI: *Oscar Wilde*. New Directions.

The Makers of Modern Literature series will, if it continues to present achievements and estimations as laudable on both sides as the best of those already published, stand as the most stimulating collection of unacademic critical studies that has appeared in print. But a rigorous selection is to be maintained if the editors are not to confuse "Makers of" with *participants in* modern literature. This confusion is demonstrated accidentally, amply and I may say brilliantly by Edouard Roditi in his *Oscar Wilde*. Now that the air is critically astir with re-discoveries, it is a temptation for every litterateur to push into the front rank of prestige the favorite *lares* and *penates* that he has been jealously guarding on his private shelf and it is startling, not to say embarrassing, to find that notorious and notoriously second-rate aesthete, Oscar, being advanced as an important practitioner of criticism and poetry just as we had politely been looking the other way while E. R. Bentley, in *The Playwright as Thinker*, was nudging him into the company of Strindberg, Shaw, Pirandello and Sartre as a gifted playwright.

The central fact of Wilde's importance, for Roditi, seems to arise from his having restated, agreed or disagreed with, accentuated, elaborated, summarized or vulgarized, ideas, tendencies, forms or attitudes which already existed. Thus, his aesthetics were, to go no further back, echoes of Walter Pater, Flaubert, Ruskin and Huysmans, his poetic styles a lavender-and-bold-lace pastiche of Poe, Keats, Tennyson and Baudelaire, among others, and his stance an emasculated but florid recapitulation of the poses struck by Beau Brummel, Byron, Bulwer-Lytton and Maturin. Since Roditi is as honest as he is ostentatious he is forced to admit these derivations but he so defends his subject with a scintillating palisade of references, influences, and cognates that one is inclined to lose sight of the poor wretch shuddering behind this wall of esoterica who has nothing really to distinguish him but his long hair and knee-breeches and an indubitable talent for self-advertisement. To be aware of cultural continuity, to partake of it, discourse on it, re-arrange it for the necessities of one's art, one's opinions or one's conduct, are the inevitable occupations of any intellectual. That Wilde importantly, creatively, achieved any fundamental criticism or expression of this continuity is beyond Roditi's power to persuade. Lacking persuasion, he tries dazzle, and we are offered this sort of circumvallation:

Ever since the Eighteenth Century, when it had inspired scientific and mechanical experiments such as the Abbe Castel's color-organ or

Diderot's investigations of blindness, the theory of synesthesia, according to which one sense is able to perceive what appeals to another sense, had haunted the whole tradition of European Romanticism. Hoffman, in his tales, had frequently suggested confusions of the arts and senses; Leopardi had discussed them in his prose-works; they appear often, as a theme, in the fiction of Balzac; they are illustrated in the art of Rossetti, who created *The Blessed Damozel* as a poem when he might have depicted her as perfectly in a painting; they inform much of Baudelaire's imagery, become a doctrine in his sonnet *Correspondences*, and are taken literally by Rimbaud in his puzzling *Sonnet des voyelles*; finally, the confusion of the senses was proposed by Huysmans, in *A Rebours*. . . . Wilde thus . . . wrote *The Birthday of the Infanta*, one of his fairy-tales, after the manner of Velasquez, though he never stated it, much as Hoffman had once written *Princess Brambilla* "after the manner of Jacques Callot" or as the French poet Aloysius Bertrand had composed the prose poems of *Gaspard de la nuit* after the manner of the same fantastic draftsman.

Roditi can go on like this for pages (there are thirty-three allusions on pages 22 to 25 of his text) and I must say that the guy's erudition is impressive! — but I have a feeling that what he actually had on his hands was the equipment for writing a history of poetry or perhaps of nineteenth-century aesthetic theory. Why he squandered it to demonstrate that poor Wilde was chock-full of book-and-art learning is beyond me.

The task of critical revival has no nobler and more sympathetic purpose than to lead us again to the constructively critical and permanently vital elements in an artist's work. Of literature, especially, we do put the pragmatic questions, do we not? "What is it centrally about? And with what integrity was it done?" It seems to me that Roditi's re-exploration simply cannot return us to Oscar Wilde's work with anything but revulsion from the meretricious poetry, from the obviously derivative and sickly aestheticism, from the downright inferiority of performance in any of Wilde's forms we inspect. At times he was an adequate and witty critic of poetry, but his infantile and voluptuous notions of life and therefore of the purposes of prose fiction led him to under-rate the best of his contemporaries in this branch and caused him to place Balzac's novels, as "artistic masterpieces" below *The Cloister and the Hearth* and *The Vicomte de Bragelonne*. Of Wilde's own fiction, Roditi fails to attest the supremacy. His desire to see *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a serious moral apologue is more fervent than justified; his brief and spurious under-rating of James as against Wilde is a deplorable example of criticism which betrays the whole by inflating the part. As to Wilde's theatrical gifts, they were fortuitous and pretty. His social plays were trashy, badly manufactured structures of sentimental drama, justified for posterity solely on the merits of their epigrams which were wonderful and still charm when couched in the superb delivery of a Gielgud; otherwise, they do not improve with age except to the perennial adolescent who finds it easier to sneer than to think. (Anyone who has ever directed a play by Wilde and, finding himself short-handed, found it necessary to omit a supporting character and to give his lines to another will have been delighted at how unnoticeable the transference was.) Roditi works hard further to assure us of Wilde's development as a poet from the neo-Hellenism of his early artificial verse to "an ever greater ability to integrate the raw material of individual experience . . ." For climax of the integration Roditi displays the wretched stanza from *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* that ends:

Their uniforms were spick and span,  
 And they wore their Sunday suits,  
 But we knew the work they had been at,  
 By the quicklime on their boots.

Finally, Roditi might have sacrificed some of his lengthy digressions into the revival of Senecan drama in sixteenth-century Italy or into futile analyses of Dianoia and Catharsis in *Salome* (What's Hecuba to him?) in favor of a more comprehensive consideration of the critic as artist, the title subject of what Roditi believes to be Wilde's most important didactic essay; "the necessary limits of his discussion," he assures us, make detailed exposition impossible.

As it is, time has not dealt so kindly as Roditi with the main paradoxes of Wilde's criticism. His art-for-art's sake doctrine could not be seriously questioned if he had meant by it that art should be honored in its medium exactly because it is an organic expression of human life and, like life, not to be dishonored by dogmatic obsession or inherited formulae. We know he didn't mean that; in fact, he separated art from life for fear of the life he might have put into his art. The dilemma caught up with him, and in *De Profundis*, a recognition of his errors that came only after he had received punishment from them, Roditi wishes us to see Wilde converted into "an earnest and deep-thinking poet." One should compare Wilde's essay with Chapters I and CIII of T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* or with any fifty autobiographical pages of Proust, for example, to estimate the decidedly relative value of Roditi's judgment. *The Soul of Man under Socialism* contains some solid aphoristic virtues; however, Roditi's struggle to explain Wilde's treatment of the Utopia thesis is as primary an excursion into political science as one might find in the nearest night-school citizenship course. When, in addition, he unqualifiedly grades Wilde as "among the greatest and most creative writers of prose poetry" in English, "especially in some of his fairy-tales," one can only oppose a blunt denial and slam the door that separates the poetaster from Thomas Browne, Laurence Sterne, Cardinal Newman, John Ruskin, Joseph Conrad, James Stephens — but why go on?

Wilde's legacy is a shabby one. Fifty years of psychology have successfully proved that "the fact of a man being a poisoner has [*everything*] to do with his prose" and that no *man* (in the complete sense Freud understood) ever kills the thing he loves. Wilde performed a valuable service in attacking Philistia. His action in precipitating a court trial, to say nothing of his general exhibitionism, cancelled this service, and it is to his model of behaviour as much as to any artist's in the last century that we owe the suspect and depreciated position that anyone who undertakes the life of art — or the life of the mind in some relation to art — still suffers under. Certainly his successors in the homosexual fraternity cannot, I suppose, applaud either his defenses or his sentimental literary symbolism. He was one of those who used his malady — I have Proust's guarantee for this definition — not, to quote M. C. Richards, "as a cross to be borne but as a flag to be waved." And a bitter destiny made it into a cross for him as well. Roditi is welcome to help carry it for him into posterity as an accolade of art. Posterity would be more accurately served, I should think, by an examination of someone who was, in a fuller and more deeply engaged way, a maker of modern literature.



## Add the Files of ACCENT to Your Library

### 1) ACCENT ANTHOLOGY — a 687-page selection from the first five years, 1940-1945, published by Harcourt, Brace, containing:

Narrative prose by 26 writers: Eudora Welty, James Hanley, Walter Van Tilburg Clark, Jack Jones, Katherine Anne Porter, Paul Bartlett, Irwin Shaw, Kay Boyle, Richard Posner, J. F. Powers, Gilbert Neiman, Agnes Macdonald, Sidney Alexander, James T. Farrell, Jules Laforgue, Richard Wright, Meyer Liben, Ben Field, etc.

Poetry by 45 writers: A. M. Klein, Marguerite Young, E. E. Cummings, Rosalie Moore, Wallace Stevens, Dylan Thomas, W. Y. Tindall, Horace Gregory, C. E. Auferheide, Henry Treece, Robert Fitzgerald, Marius Bewley, Harry Brown, Jean Garrigue, Kenneth O. Hanson, G. P. Elliott, John Berryman, Nicholas Moore, Yvan Goll, etc.

Critical prose by 18 writers: R. P. Blackmur, Kenneth Burke, Marjorie Brace, Delmore Schwartz, F. O. Matthiessen, Paul Rosenfeld, Cleanth Brooks, Otis Ferguson, David Daiches, Harry Slochower, Wallace Fowle, Arthur Mizener, Eric Bentley, T. Weiss, Richard Eberhart, E. B. Burgum, Ruth Herschberger, Henry Miller

Published price . . . \$4.00

### 2) Single copies, 1946-1948:

WINTER 1946: *Gide* by Wallace Fowle, *Epic Theatre* by Eric Bentley, stories by J. F. Powers & Victor H. Johnson, poems by Horace Gregory, C. C. Wallis, etc. . . . 30c

SPRING 1946: *Literature as an Institution* by Harry Levin, *Yeats* by Morton I. Seiden, *Parker Tyler's Poetry* by W. C. Williams, *Three Ballads* by Bertolt Brecht, stories by Ben Field & Peggy Bennett, poems by Howard Nutt, Josephine Miles, etc. . . . 30c

SUMMER 1946: *Vachel Lindsay* by Austin Warren, *Eliot's 'Death by Water'* by Grover Smith, *Naturalism in 1946* by C. C. Walcott, stories by Katherine Anne Porter & Flannery O'Connor, poems by Mina Loy, D. C. DeJong, Richard Wilbur, etc. . . . 30c

AUTUMN 1946: *The Death of Mayakowsky* by Boris Pasternak, *The Prolapsed World of Sartre* by W. M. Frohock, two plays by Bertolt Brecht, stories by Jack Jones & Reginald Moore, poems by Louis Aragon, Pablo Neruda, J. F. Sims, etc. . . . 30c

WINTER 1947: *Hopkins* by Henry Silverstein, *Tate's 'The Fathers'* by Arthur Mizener, *Hardy and Waugh* by R. B. Heilman, stories by William Fifield & Edwin Moseley, poems by Rosalie Moore, Mina Loy, J. F. Nims, etc. . . . 30c

SPRING 1947: *Van Wyck Brooks and Biographical Criticism* by Stanley E. Hyman, *Symbol and Theme in 'Flowering Judas'* by Ray B. West, Jr., stories by J. F. Powers & Daniel Curley, poems by Boris Pasternak, Esther McCoy, etc. . . . 30c

SUMMER 1947: *Ideology and Myth* by Kenneth Burke, *On 'All the King's Men'* by Norton Girault, *On Recent Poetry* by Joseph Warren Beach, stories by Ruth Domino & Morris Emmett, poems by Robert Horan, Edwin Honig, A. Y. Fisher, etc. . . . 30c

AUTUMN 1947: *Keats and Crane* by Frajam Taylor, *On 'King Lear'* by R. B. Heilman, *Laurence* by Vernon A. Young, a play by Bertolt Brecht, stories by Elizabeth Bertridge & Howard Moss, poems by Wallace Stevens, Nelson Del Bittner, etc. . . . 30c

WINTER 1948: *The French Literary Mind* by Wallace Fowle, *Kafka's Cage* by R. W. Stallman, *Criticism for the Next Phase* by Kenneth Burke, *Big Medicine* in 'Moby Dick' by Reginald L. Cook, stories by R. V. Cassill & William Sansom, poems by F. Garcia Lorca, Jene Lyon, James Merrill, Arthur Gregor, etc. . . . 30c

SPRING 1948: *Oedipus Rex* by Francis Fergusson, *Dream-America* by Klaus Mann, *The Last of Shaw?* by Margaret Webster, *The Critic as Narcissus* by Stanley E. Hyman, a story by William Goyen, poems by W. S. Graham, Joseph Warren Beach, etc. . . . 30c

### 3) A one-year subscription (four forthcoming issues) . . . . . \$1.00

Total value . . . \$8.00

Any of the above items may be ordered separately. Note, however, that you may obtain all of them for only  
**\$6.00**

Address ACCENT, 102 University Station, Urbana, Illinois

# CONTENTS

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| William Sansom: <i>How Claeys Died</i> .....   | 195 |
| Robert M. Adams: <i>A Hawk and a Handsaw for Ezra Pound</i> .....                                  | 205 |
| Willard Maas: <i>In the Tower Two Angels Hold My Hands</i> .....                                   | 215 |
| Mason Jordan Mason: <i>Chanty</i> .....  | 216 |
| <i>Queen Gramophone</i> .....  | 217 |
| <i>One Restless Coot</i> .....   | 217 |
| Vernon Watkins: <i>Birthday Sleep</i> .....  | 218 |
| Daniel Curley: <i>Saccovanzetti</i> .....  | 219 |
| John Waller: <i>The Poetry of Keith Douglas</i> .....  | 226 |
| Vernon A. Young: <i>Oscar Wilde's Fan</i> (review of <i>Oscar Wilde</i><br>by Edouard Roditi)..... | 235 |
| Index to Volume VIII.....  | 239 |

---

EDITORS: Kerker Quinn, Charles Shattuck, Arthur Carr, John Schacht, Donald Hill, George Scouffas, Carl Hartman, Lester Heller.

ASSISTANTS: Penny Hartman, Sally Jauch, Mary Bath.

---

ACCENT: Box 102 University Station, Urbana, Illinois. Published quarterly. Subscription: \$1.00 for a year, \$1.75 for two years in the United States (elsewhere \$1.25 for a year, \$2.00 for two years). Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed envelopes. Entered as second-class matter Sept. 26, 1940, at the post office at Urbana, Illinois, under the act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1948, by ACCENT.

# THE BOOK FIND CLUB

*The Club that has brought you*

UNDER COVER • STRANGE FRUIT • THE BIG SKY  
THE AGE OF JACKSON • THE NAKED AND THE DEAD

*now offers another notable selection —*

## The Stilwell Papers

"It is an important story. Its lessons for today are unmistakable. General Stilwell is the first of the war's big wheels to take the hood off the works and, in salty terms whose frankness will startle many, show the common folks how the sparks flew around."

*Ira Wolfert, NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW*

*Start your membership with "The Stilwell Papers" and receive, as a GIFT, any one of these outstanding selections*

OUR PLUNDERED PLANET  
*by Fairfield Osborn*

CRITICS AND CRUSADERS  
*by Charles A Madison*

MASK FOR PRIVILEGE  
*by Carey McWilliams*

PROUD DESTINY  
*by Lion Feuchtwanger*

THE TIMES OF  
MELVILLE AND WHITMAN  
*by Van Wyck Brooks*

THE AGE OF JACKSON  
*by Arthur M Schlesinger, Jr*

THE STILWELL PAPERS and other selections mentioned above are representative of the books — the best in fiction and non-fiction — that the Book Find Club distributes to its members month after month. The publisher's list prices for these selections range from \$2.50

to \$5.00, but Book Find Club members pay only the regular membership price of \$1.65 a book (plus 14c postage and handling.) Start your Book Find Club membership by filling out and mailing the coupon below today:

### The Book Find Club

401 Broadway, New York 13, N. Y.

Please enroll me as a member of the Club and send me THE STILWELL PAPERS as my first selection. I agree to purchase at least 4 selections a year at the SPECIAL MEMBERSHIP RATE OF ONLY \$1.65 A BOOK (plus 14c postage and handling). I may cancel my membership at any time after purchasing four selections. Send me as my FREE GIFT BOOK the selection I have indicated in the space at the right:

NAME

STREET

CITY

ZONE

STATE

(Choose a FREE GIFT BOOK from the  
Selections listed above)



FOR THE FINEST  
IN FICTION

IT'S

FOLLETT'S

*Superior Printing  
Services*

CAN ONLY BE PRODUCED BY  
MODERN EQUIPMENT—SKILLED  
CRAFTSMEN AND A COMPLETE  
ASSORTMENT OF TYPE FACES—

These essential Elements are all  
Available for Publication and  
Commercial Printing at

Flanigan-Pearson Co.

10-12 Chester Street

Phone 3994

Champaign, Ill.

BOOKS

SUPPLIES

SOUVENIRS

STATIONERY

GREETING CARDS



SCHREIBER'S  
BOOK STORE

711 S. Wright

The Spot to Shop



Art and Engineering Supplies

Textbooks • Stationery

Sporting Goods

ILLINI UNION BOOK STORE

Students' Cooperative

## P o e t r y

### verse

William Abrahams  
John Ciardi  
Randall Jarrell  
Weldon Kees  
James Merrill  
William Saroyan  
Karl Shapiro  
Stephen Spender

### criticism

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

"Notes Toward an  
Autobiography"

WILLIAM VAN O'CONNOR

"Mannikin Mythology:  
The Fashion Magazine  
as a Literary Vehicle"

HERBERT J. MULLER

"Pursuit of the Demon"

RUTH STEPHAN

"The Intentional Mystic"

RICHARD EBERHART

"Art and Zeitgeist"

ISRAEL NEWMAN, M.D.

"Poetry and  
Consciousness"



photographs and news  
notes in every issue

232 E. Erie Street, Chicago 11, Illinois

\$4.00 per year